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ABSTRACT

Data were collected from 307 senior level student teachers over 3 semesters in rural and urban placements and from 78 cooperating teachers on the qualities they considered most important for cooperating teachers. Cooperating teachers also offered information about skills and practices that work successfully in the student teaching relationship. Both groups completed open-ended questionnaires, the results of which were categorized and responses listed in order of frequency. Findings indicated that selection would center on individuals with the ability to communicate and provide feedback and who are open to sharing their internal and external resources. Additional characteristics would include ability to provide a supportive environment, organization, enthusiasm, pedagogical knowledge, and flexibility. Formal, periodic cooperating teacher evaluation is recommended. Four suggestions are made for cooperative teacher training programs. First, a collaborative approach between colleges and school districts would give the cooperating teachers the increased respect and recognition they deserve. Second, inclusion of current research in cooperative teacher training would ensure that teachers are current with current teacher training methodology. Third, training in interpersonal communication skills should be provided, including developments and techniques in mentoring, counseling, conferencing, and observation of student teachers. Fourth, clearly stating expectations concerning effective qualities of students as well as cooperating teachers would improve the cooperating teacher-student teacher relationship which, in turn, would improve the student teaching experience. The program evaluation form, table of student teachers' views, table of cooperating teachers' views, and feedback forms are attached. (NAV)

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ED 394 950

Evaluation of Cooperating Teacher Effectiveness

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INTRODUCTION

The role of the cooperating teacher as a mentor is the most frequently overlooked link to successful student teaching programs. Although researchers agree on the importance of the role of the cooperating teacher, little information exists that provides a research base for the work of the cooperating teacher in teacher education preparation.

Guyton (1989) suggests that the cooperating teacher is a key influence when examining the success or failure of a student teacher. In 1969, Yee (1969) described the cooperating teacher as "the most relevant variable operating in student teaching" (p. 327). Other researchers (Karmos and Jacko, 1977; Alper and Petish, 1980; Dispoto, 1980) contend that the cooperating teacher has a great influence on the student teacher during the student teaching experience. Teacher educators tend to agree that good cooperating teachers are essential to a successful student teaching program; however, Guyton and McIntyre (1990) suggest that "student teaching has failed to evolve much beyond the medieval apprenticeship training model" (p. 515). Therefore, teacher preparation institutions must provide a profile of the role of the cooperating teacher in their programs before successful training programs can be designed. This paper not only examines the question of what constitutes an effective cooperating teacher in the views of student teachers and practicing cooperating teachers themselves, but also suggests applications of the derived responses.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Since researchers agree that effective cooperating teachers are essential to student teacher success, then it becomes imperative that teacher preparation institutions articulate the qualities, characteristics, and interests of those individuals selected as cooperating teachers. The problem is the individuals (i.e. student teachers) who perhaps work most closely with cooperating teachers, and the cooperating teachers themselves, have seldom been asked to describe what it is that makes an effective cooperating teacher.

Therefore, data collected from student teachers would be useful in helping to define the qualities that determine cooperating teacher effectiveness. Additionally, educators who serve as cooperating teachers also have valuable information about what skills and practices work successfully in the student teaching relationship. Using combined feedback from student teachers and cooperating teachers could greatly assist teacher preparation institutions in upgrading training programs for cooperating teachers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Guyton and McIntyre (1990) suggest that student teaching is a widely accepted component of teacher preparation but is "criticized for lacking a theoretical and conceptual framework, for lacking commonly espoused goals and for not fulfilling its potential" (p. 515). There is little evidence in the literature that teacher education institutions are formally pursuing preparation of cooperating teachers on a consistent basis. Shippy's study (1989), indicated that a mere 22% of 111 cooperating teachers studied had college level supervisory training.

One suggested model for an effective field experiences program includes linking school experiences to teacher education programs. Zeichner (1983) is most often cited as a researcher who ascribes to the inquiry-oriented approach. In this model, student teachers are asked to think about the origin and consequences of their actions as teachers. Zeichner's suggestion is the basis for a reflective approach. Reflective teachers have been defined as practitioners who think deeply about how their students learn and why, about their own teaching and how to modify and improve it, and about the social and cultural customs that have led to the present system of schooling (Bradley, 1991, 1994).

A different view is reported in Yamashita's (1990) work suggesting that "nationally, formal evaluation of cooperating teachers is rare" (p. 2). Yamashita's (1990) study summarizes the literature review with the following areas of major findings:

1. The cooperating teacher has a significant impact on the attitudes and teaching behavior of the student teacher.
2. The college coordinator has little or no direct effect on the student teacher.

3. Cooperating teacher selection is a neglected aspect of teacher preparation programs.

4. Although there is agreement among teacher educators that cooperating teachers need special training, there is very little agreement about what the content of that special training should be (p. 2).

Guyton (1989) believes " awareness is the first step toward changing behavior, and if cooperating teachers are aware of the importance of the experience, of their roles, and of what does and doesn't work, they are more likely to be good supervisors" (p. 55-56). In addition, Hauwiller, et. al. (1988-89), contend that "cooperating teachers need a strong sense of the university components of training, and university people need feedback and other input from schools" (p. 11). In 1988, Richardson-Kochler noted, "cooperating teachers felt the strongest influence (both positive and negative) on their learning to teach was their student teaching experience" (p.30). As early as 1977, Cruickshank and Kennedy (1977) and Karmos and Jacko (1977), suggest the supervising teacher (cooperating teacher) is the student teacher's significant other.

The importance of early field experiences has not led teacher educators to examine the quality of the experience, even though it is considered a critical event in the education of teachers says Goodman (1985). Bradley (1991), writing in Education Week, suggests "to date, the incentives for teachers to become deeply involved in the preparation of future educators have been minimal" (p. 18). Yet educators struggle with developing appropriate experiences for pre-student teachers as more and more demands are placed on teacher education programs to provide meaningful practicum experiences.

Piland and Auglin note (1993), a strong orientation program before and between placements should be developed for student teachers, cooperating teachers and college supervisors. Finally, in many states the field experiences and cooperating teacher workshops and courses have been mandated by legislative action. Thus, educators can no longer argue over philosophical issues concerning field placements or the opportunity for cooperating teacher preparation; rather, it becomes a pragmatic issue that involves the student teacher, the cooperating teacher, the supervisor and the university.

METHODOLOGY

Data was collected from 307 senior level students using the Program Evaluation Form (Table 1) at the end of their student teaching semester. Data collections occurred over the course of three semesters and included rural and urban student teaching placements. The Program Evaluation Form divided the semester into two eight week sessions (one K-3, one grades 4-6). To avoid guiding student responses and to elicit a genuine range of responses, an open-ended format was used. The form included several questions regarding university academic preparation and ways to improve the student teaching experience. Content analysis was derived specifically from question two, "What are some of the things your cooperating teacher did which you valued and/or appreciated? (Any changes recommended?)". Student responses regarding cooperating teachers' characteristics were tabulated and listed in order of their frequency (Table 2).

An open-ended questionnaire (Table 3) was used to collect feedback from 78 cooperating teachers on effective cooperating teacher characteristics during the course of one semester. The teachers were from both rural and urban settings and 95 percent had worked with more than one student teacher. The questions asked were:

1. What do you believe is the single most valuable thing an effective cooperating teacher can provide a student teacher?
2. What do you think student teachers would say cooperating teachers did that was most valued/appreciated by them?
3. What are some of the qualities you believe describe an effective cooperating teacher?
4. What do you think are the most valuable experiences you can provide a student teacher?

Responses were categorized and listed in order of frequency for each of the questions asked. As with the student teacher instrument, the cooperating teacher survey was designed to be open-ended to elicit a range of genuine responses.

RESULTS

Responses listed in Table 2 demonstrate students believe the most valuable help from the cooperating teachers came in the form of feedback,

shared ideas and the freedom to experiment and try new things. The most frequently cited comments were identical for both session one and two. Helpful feedback from the cooperating teacher was by far the most effective quality in the minds of student teachers, whereas it was not considered significant in two of the questions that cooperating teachers answered. Cooperating teachers did list feedback as the second most important quality when describing effective cooperating teachers (question 3) and included feedback as number one, along with sharing of ideas when projecting what student teachers would list as most valued. It is clear, from these responses, cooperating teachers do have an awareness of what student teachers feel is vital to a positive student teaching experience.

The second most mentioned effective quality student teachers felt cooperating teachers should possess was the willingness to share ideas and files. Typical responses regarding professional sharing included comments such as, "My coop served as a great example for me", "gave me a lot of direction and resources for my unit", "helped me with discipline tips", "gave me a million ideas," and "let me use all her materials". Cooperating teachers' responses in the category of sharing ideas were very consistent with those of student teachers. It was cited as number one in questions one and two and as third in question three (Table 3).

Freedom to be in charge and to try new things were the third most important considerations noted by student teachers as effective. "My coop supported my decisions and actions" and "I was given the freedom to experiment" were typical responses mentioned by several student teachers on the Program Evaluation Forms (Table 1). Other students shared comments such as, "I really appreciated being allowed to try new things", and "the coop left the room a great deal and let me handle the situations that arose". Cooperating teacher responses were clearly parallel with student teacher responses on this quality. The freedom to be in charge and try new things was mentioned as important under each of the four questions cooperating teachers answered.

Tables 2 and 3 show general consistency in comparisons of other effective cooperating teacher qualities listed by student teachers and coops. The one item of significant disagreement was the trait of flexibility. Cooperating teachers mentioned it as number one when listing qualities of an effective cooperating teacher (Table 3, question 3), whereas it is not listed at all under student teacher responses.

Findings at the bottom of Table 2 indicate items viewed as negative by student teachers. The lack of helpful feedback was mentioned twenty times. Since feedback was cited by student teachers as the most valued attribute of cooperating teachers, it stands to reason that its absence would be considered a most negative trait. Other typical negative comments were, "The coop never let me take total control of the classroom", "never offered positive reinforcement", "gave mostly negative comments", and "was not friendly until the last week of student teaching". One student commented on the cooperating teacher's insistence to teach exactly the same, about the confinement felt and the lack of opportunity to try new approaches. It should be noted, however, that many of the negative comments were offered by the same individuals, so the numbers listed actually represent fewer students than would first appear.

CONCLUSIONS

By comparing and contrasting the responses derived from student teachers and cooperating teachers, field experience researchers can develop a profile of what constitutes an effective cooperating teacher. Once characteristics of an effective cooperating teacher are identified, this information can then be utilized for a number of purposes:

1. Evaluation of current cooperating teachers
2. Identification of criteria for the selection of new cooperating teachers
3. Development of effective training opportunities for cooperating teachers

Criteria for cooperating teacher selection and evaluation would necessarily be the items listed most often in Tables 2 and 3. Individuals with the ability to communicate, provide feedback and who are open to sharing their internal and external resources would be sought first. "Modeling good practice did not necessarily improve performance ratings of student teachers but feedback was found to be important," states Goodman, (p.12). Stanulis and Jeffers feel having sustained, substantive conversations during student teaching influenced the practice of both student and mentor teacher, (1995).

Cooperating teachers selected and retained would be the educators who possess the profile of an effective cooperating teacher. Normally, this selection procedure would involve the cooperation of the college field

experiences department and public school administrators. The individuals determining selection could also look at additional qualities mentioned, such as the ability to provide a supportive environment, organization, enthusiasm, pedagogical knowledge and flexibility. Basing cooperating teacher selection and evaluation on specific criteria would obviously be preferred to random selection or total reliance on volunteers. By focusing selection decisions on known effective traits, teacher educators could greatly increase quality placements for optimal growth of student teachers.

At most teacher preparation institutions, the college supervisors are routinely evaluated by the student teachers and/or cooperating teachers. (Of course, the student teachers are necessarily evaluated as part of their program.) However, it is rare that cooperating teachers are evaluated in any formal manner. The authors contend that cooperating teacher evaluation is the missing link in the triad of individuals directly linked to the student teaching process. Therefore, an optional Cooperating Teacher Feedback Form (Table 4) was developed using the data describing qualities of effective cooperating teachers contained in Tables 2 and 3. Separate forms are available for the student teacher and college supervisor to use.

Additionally, the information contained in Tables 2 and 3 would be valuable when designing training opportunities for cooperating teachers. Workshops or courses developed to enhance cooperating teacher effectiveness could help to refine the abilities of coops identified as already successful and to strengthen the quality of individuals who need to grow.

The growth opportunities designed to enhance cooperating teacher effectiveness would necessarily be based upon strengthening the qualities identified as most important in this study. Therefore, training would need to focus on building strong feedback techniques, and the willingness to share ideas and materials, along with tips for promoting a positive learning environment that provides the freedom to experiment. There are four avenues of application that could be utilized when incorporating the results found in Tables 2 and 3 into a cooperating teacher training program. These include:

1. A collaborative approach
2. Inclusion of current research

3. Enhancement of interpersonal communication skills
4. Clearly stated expectations

Cooperating teachers need increased respect and recognition for their important role in working with student teachers. Partnerships between colleges and school districts provide an effective vehicle to accomplish that goal. The level of collaboration could range from simply more dialogue and involvement in decision making related to student teachers, to the establishment of professional development school relationships. Reciprocal teaching, staff development, and provision for college credit for cooperating teachers are examples of true collaborative relationships that could be established to promote strengthening of effective cooperating teacher characteristics listed in this study.

Awareness of current research thrusts is a second consideration when developing growth opportunities for cooperating teachers. College faculty and public school personnel can exchange information regarding mutual concerns such as conferencing and feedback techniques, ways to share ideas, ways to build an environment of openness or effective teaching strategies. Many cooperating teachers feel the need to be kept current on new research findings so they can be aware of what student teachers are learning in college classes and to be on the cutting edge in providing new information to their assigned student teachers.

Enhancement of cooperating teacher interpersonal communication skills encompasses several areas. Mentoring, counseling, conferencing and observation techniques are all skills that can be enriched with training. This training could come in the form of courses or a series of workshops. Videos of real or staged examples, role playing, demonstrations and observations of other cooperating teachers are all tools and techniques which could assist in building communication skills. Development of effective interpersonal communication skills would certainly address the number one effective characteristic of cooperating teachers listed by the student teachers, which was feedback. Sharing and openness to try new things, listed in Table 2 as second and third, would also respond positively to communication skills training.

Additionally, clearly stated expectations concerning the qualities students and cooperating teachers listed as effective in this study would constitute a necessary part of cooperating teacher orientation and training. It would be during this orientation phase that the information on

effective cooperating teacher qualities could be shared. Specific suggestions for providing feedback, for sharing of ideas and files and for creating a climate of openness and freedom to try new things could be delineated.

Finally, the role of the cooperating teacher in the student teacher relationship has long been overlooked as a source of data for improving the student teaching experience. Yet, selection, evaluation and training of cooperating teachers is a vital component for a successful student teaching experience. Although additional study will be needed, the findings in this paper help confirm the fact that the single most important person in the teacher preparation program from the student's perspective is the cooperating teacher. Analyzing the students' and cooperating teachers' perceptions of the cooperating teacher's role can help define what the most positive qualities are, in order to produce more consistently effective cooperating teachers.

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TABLE 1

PROGRAM EVALUATION FORM

Congratulations on completing the student teaching phase of your undergraduate degree program. In addition to helping you, your student teaching experience can benefit future student teachers. The information that you provide will help the supervisors continue to serve student teachers in a way that is most conducive to their professional growth.

1. Comment on the elementary education program in relationship to your preparation for student teaching.

2. What are some of the things your cooperating teacher did which you valued and/or appreciated? (Any changes recommended?)

First Session -

Second Session-

3. What, if anything would have made your student teaching experience more meaningful?

4. What are some things your university supervisor did which you valued and/or appreciated? (First and second session) Also, please comment on the visitation schedule.

5. The 3-way conference provides an opportunity for the student teacher, the supervisor and the cooperating teacher to jointly assess the student teacher's professional growth. Please comment on the 3-way conference as an evaluation tool.

6. Please comment on the appropriateness of the following requirements:
   Unit -
   Bulletin Boards -
   Logs -
   Daily lesson plans -
   Videotape -

7. Please feel free to make any open-ended comments regarding your student teaching experience.

8. On the back, please use the following scale to rate the on-campus seminars.

3- Very Helpful
2- Average
1- Drop, of limited value

TABLE 2

STUDENT TEACHER VIEW
(N=307)

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS YOUR COOPERATING TEACHER DID WHICH YOU VALUED AND/OR APPRECIATED?

SESSION ONE		SESSION TWO	
Gave helpful feedback	130	Gave helpful feedback	113
Shared files/ideas	81	Shared files/ideas	64
Freedom to try new things	61	Freedom to try new things	55
Receptive/supportive	60	A good model	34
Understanding/caring	29	Receptive/supportive	28
Encouragement/praise	26	Encouragement/praise	27
A good model	24	Professional treatment	27
Professional treatment	22	Understanding/caring	18
Let have classroom alone	15	Shared management tips	17
Taught me organization	14	Let have classroom alone	14
Helped me start immediately	10	Helped me start immediately	10

NEGATIVE RESPONSES

Not enough feedback	11	Never had total control	11
Made me feel uncomfortable	5	Not enough feedback	9
		Negative/ not accepting	7

TABLE 3

COOPERATIVE TEACHER VIEW
(N=78)

1. WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS THE SINGLE MOST VALUABLE THING AN EFFECTIVE COOPERATING TEACHER CAN PROVIDE A STUDENT TEACHER?

Ideas & methods in planning and management skills/role model	32
Time & freedom to try new ideas	27
Positive environment & experience	10
Supervised practice & guidance	6

2. WHAT DO YOU THINK STUDENT TEACHERS WOULD SAY COOPERATING TEACHERS DID THAT WAS MOST VALUED/APPRECIATED BY THEM?

Provided ideas, feedback, dialogue	49
Provided time & freedom to try out ideas	22
Guidance, support and encouragement	17
Discipline	8
Positive relationship	6

3. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE QUALITIES YOU BELIEVE DESCRIBE AN EFFECTIVE COOPERATING TEACHER?

Flexibility	27
Feedback	21
Sharing	20
Nurture and encourage support	17
Patience	16
Freedom to handle classroom	16
Organization	14
Humor	12
Communication skills	10
Friend	10

4. WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCES YOU CAN PROVIDE A STUDENT TEACHER?

Models of skills & teaching strategies	27
Discipline	21
Allow student teacher to be in charge	19
Exposure to many situations	17
Experiences	11

TABLE 4

COOPERATING TEACHER EVALUATION FORM
(cover sheet)

Following are copies of the optional Cooperating Teacher Feedback Sheets your assigned ISU supervisor and student teacher will complete only upon your request. This is in response to the new teacher education initiative to provide opportunities for the key participants in the student teaching triad (coop teacher, student teacher and supervisor) to share feedback.

Once three of these forms have been accumulated from supervisors and student teachers, they will be compiled and returned to you for your personal feedback. (This number is to ensure a degree of confidentiality for the individuals filling out the forms.) Copies of these forms will not be sent to your principal or anyone else in your school district. They are entirely for your information and assistance in working with future student teachers. Please feel free to visit with your ISU supervisor if you have additional questions regarding this mutual process.

COOPERATING TEACHER FEEDBACK FORM
(student version)

COOP NAME_____SCHOOL DISTRICT_____

SCHOOL NAME_____GRADE LEVEL_____

CONTENT AREA_____

Please supply feedback to the cooperating teacher with who you are currently working on a scale of 1 to 5. Seal in an envelope and give to your supervisor to return.

5-SUPERIOR
4-ABOVE AVERAGE
3-AVERAGE
2-NEEDS IMPROVEMENT IN SOME AREAS
1-RECONSIDER USING AS A COOP

___1. Provides valuable feedback to student teacher
___2. Shares teaching files/ideas
___3. Provides a positive and professional role model
___4. Provides freedom to try new things
___5. Is receptive/supportive to student teacher
___6. Includes student teacher in planning
___7. Provides realistic expectations for student teacher
___8. Shares classroom organizational plan & grading system
___9. Shares current teaching strategies
___10. Gives control of classroom to student teacher when appropriate
___11. Provides valuable feedback to supervisor
___12. Helps student teacher expand their content knowledge

13. Additional expertise/training/interests

14. Special considerations or restrictions on placement:

(Note: This form is optional. Complete only at the request of the cooperating teacher.

COOPERATING TEACHER FEEDBACK FORM
(supervisor version)

COOP NAME_____SCHOOL DISTRICT_____

SCHOOL NAME_____GRADE LEVEL_____

CONTENT AREA_____

Please supply feedback to the cooperating teacher with who you are currently working on a scale of 1 to 5. Seal in an envelope and give to your supervisor to return.

5-SUPERIOR
4-ABOVE AVERAGE
3-AVERAGE
2-NEEDS IMPROVEMENT IN SOME AREAS
1-RECONSIDER USING AS A COOP

___1. Provides valuable feedback to student teacher
___2. Shares teaching files/ideas
___3. Provides a positive and professional role model
___4. Provides freedom to try new things
___5. Is receptive/supportive to student teacher
___6. Includes student teacher in planning
___7. Provides realistic expectations for student teacher
___8. Shares classroom organizational plan & grading system
___9. Shares current teaching strategies
___10. Gives control of classroom to student teacher when appropriate
___11. Provides valuable feedback to supervisor
___12. Helps student teacher expand their content knowledge

13. Additional expertise/training/interests

14. Special considerations or restrictions on placement:

(Note: This form is optional. Complete only at the request of the cooperating teacher.)